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Internet hosts a world's fair on your computer

When the first world's fair in London in 1851 showed off the McCormick reaper, the precedent was set. World's fairs from then on showcased technology that would change civilization: John Otis' elevator in 1853, the phonograph and telephone in 1876, early demonstrations of radio in 1904, and television in 1939.

Through the first 100 years of the fairs, "This is the way people were able to present their technologies to a wide mass of people," said Thomas Judd, a fair expert and historian at the State University of New York at Oswego.

This year the fairgrounds is the technology. Sometime between Feb. 6 and 8, the Internet 1996 World Exposition (<http://park.org>) officially opens, and it will be just like the old days — a full year of technology, culture, music, visiting heads of state and even food.

The site, designed by EnviroMedia of Cincinnati, uses Art Deco features and post-card images to evoke the spirit of past world's fairs.

From a home computer you can

tour the Aw Taw Kaw Market in Bangkok in Thailand's pavilion, listen to radio stations from all over the world in Britain's pavilion, attend the Durga Puga festival in India and see the strange wildlife of the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador's pavilion. Also, Japan is establishing the Sensorium, a multimedia experience of Japanese culture.

The year will be filled with special events, like the Brain Opera from Lincoln Center (<http://brainop.media.mit.edu>) this summer and U.S. presidential debates in October. There are pavilions from 27 countries and 17 are already partially open. Another two dozen countries may join in.

Carl Malamud is the fair's secretary general and a relentless advocate of public spaces on the Internet. Malamud pioneered audio on the Internet with his Internet Multicasting Service and Geek of the Week interviews and drove the federal government onto it by posting patents and Securities and Exchange Commission documents at his town.hall.org site.

He roped in dozens of companies that contributed \$100 million in equipment and effort. Some 500

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people worldwide are working to present the fair.

Malamud is concerned the Internet community is filling up with strip malls. The future of the Internet may be commerce, but that can't be all.

"If you're going to have a coherent business environment, you've got to have parks and schools and museums," he said. "Cities that don't have those, don't attract workers, they don't attract visitors."

Past world's fairs have left behind great structures, such as the Eiffel Tower and the Chicago Art Institute. The Internet fair also will leave behind public structures. First is Central Park, a group of high-capacity servers to be used only for public informa-

tion. "Central Park stays around after the fair, and goes from being the fairgrounds to being a public park for the global village," Malamud said.

Second is the Internet Railroad, thousands of miles of lightning-fast trunk lines connecting the Central Park servers. The railroad will triple the speed of the Tokyo-Washington connection, and the lines through Asia will be that continent's first high-speed Internet trunk lines.

All this means fair-goers will get fast connections, and there's plenty of capacity to support audio, video and Shockwave multimedia presentations.

Japan has the largest involvement, with 22 corporations, compared to nine from the United

States, and the Sensorium may be the slickest of all the pavilions. Why? Many think Japan trails the United States in Internet technology. That's wrong, Malamud said, and Japan's effort will prove it.

"The Internet is just about to go ballistic in Japan, and this project came walking in the door, and it caught the attention of a lot of senior Japanese executives," Malamud said. "The telecommunications base in Japan is probably better than the U.S. in some ways. I've been traveling to Japan for several years and have always felt they've been right up there with us."

The point is to take the Internet to the masses, to substitute learning for the random, medium-is-the-message surfing.

"We're trying to make the medium not be the message, and see this technology really go mainstream," Malamud said. "And that's traditionally what world's fairs have done with technology."

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